

For the Love of God

From Fear to Faith

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FROM FEAR TO FAITH Psalm 56

If you have Bible, turn to Psalm 56. I'm pretty excited this morning, not just to preach Psalm 56, which I'm really looking forward to us studying together, but I also want to set the stage for a unique journey that we're going to take over the next 6 weeks together as a church. These psalms that we are reading are so rich, and Jim and Matt and I were talking about them, and I proposed something that was kind of out of the box, totally different from anything we've done at Brook Hills (at least in the last 8 years that I've been here). We're doing this in order to really get the most out of these psalms that we're reading, and they agreed to it, so here's what we're going to do...

Over the next 6 weeks (so this is just short-term...this isn't a long-term change), starting next week, Lord willing, each one of us (Jim, Matt, and I) are all going to preach different psalms in different worship gatherings. So basically, as a church, we're going to walk through three different psalms every Sunday for the next six weeks. Now obviously, you likely won't be in every gathering (I suppose you can if you want!), but each gathering will have a different preacher in a different psalm...and you won't know who's preaching when, or what psalm is being preached. And there's some Sundays where one (or even two) of us aren't here—there's at least one Sunday when both those guys aren't here on the same Sunday, so I've got the assignment of three different psalms by myself on that day—but our goal is just to immerse ourselves in the psalms over the next six weeks. Just like sermons are normally posted online the Monday after Sunday, we'll have all three of these sermons posted, so if you want, you can go back and listen to different sermons on different psalms. Or, like I mentioned, you can stick around for two (or three) worship gatherings, if you want. But at the end of 6 weeks, we'll have walked through about 20 psalms together as a church...just immersing ourselves in what is basically the Bible's hymnbook. And hopefully, by the leadership of God's Spirit through his Word among us, he will use this to deepen our worship life as a church in different ways, and he'll teach us all the more about who he is and what it means for us to find pleasure in his praise.

Now, one other thing that means is that these worship notes like they look right now will likely not look the same next week. We're not totally sure yet, but there's a good possibility this notes section in your worship guide will probably just be blank, because there will be three different sermons. But hopefully even that (again, just for a short time) might be helpful in maybe teaching us how to take notes in a sermon even without a guide with blanks to fill in. So, we'll see how this goes...six weeks of concentrated immersion in the psalms...and then we'll get back to our normal schedule. During these six weeks, for the most part we'll follow our pattern of studying psalms that we will have read the week before in our daily Bible reading.

One exception to that, though, is this week, because I want us to look ahead to Psalm 56. And the reason I want to go ahead and look forward to this psalm is because of the relationship we see in it between God's Word and God's worship. I think that will set the stage well for this immersion in the psalms. So let's start by reading Psalm 56 together. I'll read aloud, beginning in verse 1...

*Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me;
all day long an attacker oppresses me;
my enemies trample on me all day long,
for many attack me proudly.
When I am afraid,
I put my trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
What can flesh do to me?*

*All day long they injure my cause;
all their thoughts are against me for evil.
They stir up strife, they lurk;
they watch my steps,
as they have waited for my life.
For their crime will they escape?
In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!*

*You have kept count of my tossings;
put my tears in your bottle.
Are they not in your book?
Then my enemies will turn back
in the day when I call.
This I know, that God is for me.
In God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
What can man do to me?*

*I must perform my vows to you, O God;
I will render thank offerings to you.
For you have delivered my soul from death,
yes, my feet from falling,
that I may walk before God
in the light of life. (Psalm 56)*

You'll notice at the beginning of this psalm, even before verse 1, the Bible says: "*To the choirmaster: according to the dove on far-off terebinths,*" which is likely the tune to which this psalm was sung. Then it says "*a miktam of David,*" which is a musical term. And then it says, "*when the Philistines seized David at Gath.*"

So we've got this clue into the historical setting behind this psalm—it's the time "when the Philistines seized David at Gath." So let's turn back to when that happened . . . hold your place with me here in Psalm 56, and turn back with me to 1 Samuel 21:10. Now as you're turning, let me set the stage.

In 1 Samuel 20, we see that Saul, the King of Israel, is determined to kill David. So David flees King Saul. In the beginning of 1 Samuel 21, David comes to a town called Nob, where Ahimelech, the head priest, gives David some food and a weapon, and from Nob, David went to Gath, which is where we pick up in verse 10...

And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances,

*'Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands?'*

And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" (1 Samuel 21:10-15)

Now get what just happened: David fled to Gath, which by the way, was the home of Goliath, whom David had killed not too long before in 1 Samuel 17. Certainly he wasn't expecting to get a welcome party when he arrived, and to add insult to injury, the weapon David was carrying that Ahimelech had given him was the sword of Goliath. So David walks into the hometown of Goliath with Goliath's old sword in his hand; this just shows you how desperate David was. He was going wherever Saul would least likely think he would be. And when he gets there, the people obviously recognize him and they seize him, and David, fearing that they might kill him, pretends to be insane, which apparently works. So get the picture: you've got David running in fear from King Saul and all his army to Goliath's hometown, where he's seized by the Philistines. Let's just say...David's not having a good day.

Identifying with the Psalmist ...

Have you ever felt overwhelmed?

This is where I want you to think about the many ways that you (and I) might identify with David. I mean, sure, you've likely never run for your life from the king of the land, and you've likely never been seized in the hometown of a giant you once killed, but have you ever felt overwhelmed? So with that background, come back to Psalm 56 now, and think about these words:

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long . . . (Psalm 56:1-2).

All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life (Psalm 56:5-6).

This psalm describes a man under unremitting pressure. He describes how men are trampling on him, oppressing him, and injuring him. Three times he uses the phrase "*all day long*." It's like he's saying, "I can't take a breath...first it's Saul, now it's the Philistines...one thing after another after another..." Have you ever felt like that? Like you just can't get out from under it? One thing drives you to despair, and in your attempt to deal with that, something else comes along and just drives you into deeper despair...and you just want a breath...something good to happen...or even just a moment to rest. Have you ever felt overwhelmed? Maybe by big things, or maybe just a bunch of little things. I'm guessing there are people who got up this morning and came into this room feeling pretty overwhelmed by some things going on in your life. It's like you're looking for a break.

Have you ever been opposed?

Next question: Have you ever been opposed? That's the language of Psalm 56: people are "trampling" on David—"attackers" are "oppressing" him, "injuring" him, thinking "evil thoughts" about him. This language is military-like, it's militant. There's no physical attack that we know of at this point, but verbal battles and plots to be sure. Some translations use the word "slander" to describe these attacks. So, have you ever been slandered? I'm thinking particularly here about times when you've done nothing wrong. David had done nothing wrong here—this was Saul and others' vengeance against him.

So have you ever been slandered when you've done nothing wrong to deserve such slander? Have you ever been opposed for doing something right? Have you ever been unjustly attacked by others? Have someone ever plotted strife against you? Have you ever been opposed?

Have you ever felt alone?

Another question to help us identify with David: Have you ever felt alone? David has no one around him at this point. No one. A chapter later, in 1 Samuel 22, a few hundred people will join David at the cave of Adullam, but at this point, no one is with him. Have you ever felt alone? Maybe literally, physically...alone at some point in your life...maybe at this point in your life? Or maybe just felt alone. Isn't it interesting how sometimes even when surrounded by people, you can feel alone? Like no one else understands, no one else knows what's going on in your shoes.

Have you ever been afraid?

And then finally, have you ever been afraid? The key word in Psalm 56 is *afraid*. Verse 3 says, "*When I am afraid.*" It's the same word that's used in 1 Samuel 21:12 to describe how David was afraid of King Achish in Gath. And it's interesting, at the end of verse 4 and verse 11, David says, "*What can flesh do to me?*" and "*What can man do to me?*" They're rhetorical questions, but the answer seems to me, "Flesh and man can do a whole lot to you." Man can attack and oppose and injure and threaten and even kill you. That's what I appreciate about this psalm—it's real. This is not some superficial religiosity that ignores life's reality. This is right in the thick of it. David is running for his life, he's pursued by enemies on one side and surrounded by enemies on the other side...and he's afraid. It's a fear that we're all familiar with.

It's frightening what people can do to us. People can slander you and ruin your reputation. People can fire you from your job. Your spouse can be unfaithful to you and/or abandon you. People you love can abuse you, harm you, and hurt you in different ways. And it's not just people, but circumstances.

Circumstances can come at you that you can't control. I even think about the storms that we saw throughout our country and the threats of tornadoes here earlier this week. I think it was Monday night when our kids heard about it from talking with some of their friends, and they were scared about tornadoes. And they hadn't remembered when we've had storms in the past, and so some of them thought, "This is our first tornado." I said, "Well, it's not a tornado...yet." I said, "You can go to sleep, and I'm just going to watch James Spann all night, and everything will be just fine."

They were so nervous and afraid afraid. So we sat down and went through Psalm 46, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...*" And I was encouraging them and comforting them, and then we put them in their beds, and not 60 seconds after we closed that door to their bedroom, there was one of those loud BOOMS that just

reverberates throughout the whole house. And all it took was about three seconds for cries to just come from their rooms. "Okay, kids, come out. Come back out."

I joke around about that, but there's a real fear that comes with the unknown, and it's not limited to children. In this psalm, David is dealing with the fear of the unknown. He doesn't know what's going to happen next, and he's afraid of what could happen next. In the same way that we can get paralyzed by fear of the unknown. We can get so worried and so anxious about little things in our lives and about big things in our lives. What if this or that happens in my life or my marriage or my family? We can fear and worry about some of the worst things.

I'm not trying to be depressing here, but real. This is David experiencing his worst nightmare. And so the question is: how does David deal with real fear in this world? The kind of fear that we're all familiar with?

And the answer—oh, this is the most poignant part of this psalm, and it's really the crux of the song—is in verses 3 and 4. David says, "*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust,*" and then he says, "*I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?*" Did you see it? Did you see the transition that just took place? You put the beginning of verse 3 with the middle of verse 4 together, and David says, "When I am afraid...I shall not be afraid." Ha! That just begs the question, "How?"

How do you go from being afraid to not being afraid in a matter of one verse? How do you go from a frightening sense of what man can do to you to asking the question confidently, "What can flesh, what can man do to me?" And the answer is right in the middle. "*I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust*" (Psalm 56:3-4). So unpack those words with me based on the chapter as a whole.

Implications of the Psalm ...

Put your trust in the character of God.

What are the implications of this psalm for how you and I move from fear to faith? What do we do when we're overwhelmed? What do you do when you're wrongfully opposed? What do you do when you feel alone or afraid? First, put your trust in the character of God. What is the first thing David does? He looks to God.

He cries out to God. Oh, this must be our first reaction...when overwhelmed, opposed, alone, afraid...to cry out to God. Prayer is not a last resort; it's a first resort. Notice the approach here is not, "When all else fails, pray." No, it's first and foremost: Pray. This is huge.

When we are faced with that which overwhelms or those who oppose, with loneliness or fear, it is so easy for our focus to be on that which overwhelms...and the more we focus on it, the more overwhelming it gets. In the same way, the more we think about those who oppose us, the more oppressive that can be. The more we dwell on our loneliness, the more lonely we feel. The more we contemplate our fears, the more afraid we become. So what is the antidote to all these things? Instead of looking at *them*, look at *Him*. See your circumstances in light of his character. Put your trust in the character of God.

See how important the object of your faith is here. We're not talking about moving from fear to faith in general, as if the object doesn't matter. That's how the world often tries to

cope with fear. With putting faith in yourself. Or faith in your circumstances (it will get better). Or faith in other people (they'll change). No, that's not where David puts his faith. He doesn't put his faith in himself or in others or in his circumstances; he puts his faith—his trust—in the character of God. Because, follow this...

He is the omnipotent God. Nine different times David refers to God in this psalm, using the term "Elohim," the most common name for God in Scripture. It refers to his authority and power as Creator and Sustainer of everything in the world. "*In God I trust...what can flesh do to me?*" "*In God I trust...what can man do to me?*" (Psalm 56:3,11). We've already said that man can do a lot to us, but what *man* can do to you must be put in light of what *God* can do for you. For that matter, what this *world* can do to you must be seen in light of what *God* can do for you. It's like the basis for fear is what man (or this world) can do to you, and the basis for faith is what God can and will do for you. David is echoing here what we read later in Romans 8:31: "*If God is for [me], who can be against [me]?*" It's also like what Jesus says to his disciples when he sends them out in Matthew 10 like sheep among wolves, and three times he tells them, "Don't be afraid." And the reason he gives them is that man can do a lot of things to them, even kill them, but God alone has the power and authority to save your soul (Matthew 10:26-28). He is omnipotent over all. Man is flesh; God is God. And God . . .

He is the merciful God. The omnipotent God is merciful to us in our time of need. So David cries from the first verse, "*Be gracious to me, O God.*" He knows that God delights in showing mercy to the overwhelmed and the opposed, the alone and the afraid, so David cries out for grace...for unmerited, much needed mercy. Hear this, all who are overwhelmed or opposed this morning...all who feel alone or afraid...the omnipotent God of the universe is an endless source of grace to those who trust in him...to those who cry out to him. He is the merciful God who says to his people, "Cast your cares upon me, because I care for you" (from 1 Peter 5:7).

He is the God who judges sin. In verses 5-7 he says, "*All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life. For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!*" Now this is one of those places in the psalms, and we'll see this at different points, where the psalmist invokes the judgment of God, and calls down such judgment on his enemies. Some of these passages can be a bit baffling, but see this one simply...and at the same time, seriously. David is referring to unjust men who are wrongfully opposing him, sinfully plotting to take his life, and so he cries out for God to show his justice upon not just those who are opposing him, but "*the peoples,*" he says—a larger picture of sinful people, nations, and armies that are unjustly attacking and opposing not just him, but others, as well. And David finds comfort and hope and faith in the fact that God will indeed judge sin.

You know, this kind of prayer in the psalms became maybe the most real I have ever experienced when I was in Nepal a couple of months ago. When I saw the face of human trafficking like I did, when I saw villages where little girls were taken, and I walked past the brothels they were taken to...and we spent some time praying in light of this horrific sin, I found myself praying...obviously praying for those girls...but for the men (and women) who are trafficking them, and running these brothels. As I was praying (just weeping in prayer), I found myself praying on one hand for God to save those men and women, and if not to save them, then I found myself praying for God to smite them...to shut them down...to stop this injustice.

I find myself praying the same thing every week now when I pray for the oppressed and the enslaved. And I find comfort in the fact that God will show his justice upon them one day. They will not get away with this. This brings hope and stabilizes faith in a world of heinous evil. I think that's a sense of what's going on in this prayer. David prays amidst evil, knowing that God will judge sin.

This is key, by the way, and as a side note, but I believe an important one, sometimes we are overwhelmed as a result of *our* sin. Sometimes we are opposed as a result of *our* sin. Sometimes we're alone because of *our* sin, and sometimes we face fear because of *our* sin. So David in this psalm is facing these things due at this point to no fault of his own. We'll see Psalm 51, I think, in one of the gatherings next week, where David experiences some of these same emotions because of his sin, and what's happening there is completely different than what's happening in this psalm. I just want to point that out because I think about someone who is unrepentant in sin and experiencing church discipline, and they're overwhelmed by the people approaching them and calling them back to Christ. They feel opposed and maybe they feel alone because they've spurned the attempts of people to reach out to them. Maybe they've even been excommunicated from the church, and maybe they're afraid and not sure what to do next. If that's the case, then the last thing Scripture is calling you to do is just to take comfort in God. No, Scripture is calling you to come back to God. For he is omnipotent, and He is merciful. He desires to forgive you and to give you a new start, but if you refuse his mercy, he will judge you in your sin. Until you repent, you have reason to be afraid, and I would hope that you feel alone, that you feel the weight of alienation from God in sin, that you are overwhelmed by sin's consequences. I hope you're afraid to the point where you come back to him. Come back to him today. Put your trust in his character, as the one who takes sin seriously and the one who desires to show you mercy, unmerited grace, in this place.

He is the God who judges sin, and then, oh...this is where we come to maybe the most beautiful verse in this psalm, verse 8, where David says, "*You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?*" Oh, what a great picture. David knows who he is praying to. He is the God who sees, hears, knows, and remembers suffering. You keep count of my tossings. You put my tears in your bottle.

The image is likened to how ancient Israelites in arid climates would preserve precious liquids such as water or wine or milk in special containers. And so now David essentially says to God, "You store my tears like that." They're precious to you...you know every single one of them...and you remember them...they are in your book.

Just think of it, suffering friend, this morning. Overwhelmed and opposed, alone or afraid, the God of the universe knows every time you've tossed back and forth in the bed. He sees, and counts, every tear you shed. He hears every single cry, and he records, he remembers, he never forgets all of these things. The omnipotent God is not indifferent toward you. He sees, hears, knows, remembers, and cares for you in *all* your suffering. Now you might be tempted to say, "That's nice, but what good is it if he can't do anything about my suffering?" But this is the beauty of the very next verse, for David says, "*Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call.*" And then he repeats this phrase, "*whose word I praise*" in verses 10-11: "*In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" And then, in faith, he says, "*I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.*"

Now get this, David says this while he's still in the fearful throes of Gath, with King Saul and his army on his heels. Yet David renders a thank offering to God, because he knows who he's praying to. He is the God who delivers from darkness and death. You deliver my soul from death. You keep my feet from falling. Remember, this is the omnipotent God who sees your tears. This is the omnipotent God who knows your pain. And though enemies may mark your steps, and trouble may pack your path, he has power to keep your feet from falling.

He is the God who delivers from darkness and death, and he is the God who gives light to life. So in this psalm that begins with such a bleak picture of being overwhelmed and overtaken by trouble, David ends by saying that he will "*walk before God in the light of life.*" "*In the light of life*" – what a great phrase! Oh, put your trust in the character of God.

Lift your heart to the Word of God.

What do you do when you're overwhelmed or opposed, alone or afraid, or all of the above? Put your trust in the character of God, and lift your heart to the Word of God. So go back to this section of the psalm that's repeated twice – go back to verse 3: "*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.*" And then he repeats it again in the middle of the next verse: "*In God I trust; I shall not be afraid.*" David puts his trust in the character of God, but look at what's right in the middle of that—"In God, whose word I praise." Same thing at the end of verse 9, where after he says, "*This I know, that God is for me,*" he then says, "*In God, whose word, I praise.*" He then says it again, this time using the covenant name for God, "*In the LORD, whose word I praise.*" Three times, David says he praises the Word of God. So clearly, God's Word has a fundamental place in moving from fear to faith. And not just reading God's Word, or knowing God's Word, but *praising* God's Word. What does that mean?

Here's what it means. Oh, see this. See the importance of God's Word when you are overwhelmed or opposed, alone or afraid. Lift your heart to God's Word, because, first of all, his Word is supreme.

You know, some people might be uncomfortable with this kind of language—praising the Word of God—as if we're making the Word out to be an idol. But we've got to realize that God is okay with viewing his Word like this. After all, this is his Word that's giving us this picture...in a positive light. And it's not just here.

Turn over real quick to Psalm 119 and look at verse 48: "*I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.*" Then look at Psalm 119:120: "*My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.*" Then turn over to Psalm 138:2: " . . . *for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.*" God puts his name on the same plane as he puts his Word. So praising God is similar here, at least in some sense, to praising his Word. Which means trusting God in the midst of despair must mean trusting his Word.

God's Word is supreme and his Word is sure. Many commentators believe that David's reference to the Word of God here is not just a general reference to God's Word as a whole, but a specific reference to promises God had made to make David king. Back in 1 Samuel 16, David was anointed king by the decree (the Word) of God, and so here's David fleeing King Saul, afraid for his life, now in the hands of the king of Gath, and when he's tempted to think, "It's over for me," he remembers the promise that the Word God had declared, and he praises it. "Yes," he says! "If that Word is true, then I have hope. If that Word is true, then I know I will be delivered from darkness and death, and I will walk in the light of life."

Now you may think, "Well, I don't have a specific Word of promise like David had in every situation I face," but this where we realize, brothers and sisters, we have something better. We have what David didn't have. We have sixty-six books that are the written, revealed Word of God, on which you and I can bank our lives. These are sixty-six books that are filled with countless promises that God is with us and for us...promises of peace and comfort, guidance and grace...promises to love and lead us...promises that are worthy of praise and delight in us.

After seeing that God's Word is sure, next we see that his Word is sufficient. This means it's what we need, and in a real sense, it's all we need. Oh, if only we'll believe this. You and I are going to see a good illustration this week in the church's Bible reading plan of the role of the Word in fear and the role of the Word in faith. In Numbers 13-14, God's people come to the edge of the Promised Land, and they send spies in to scout out the land, and most of those spies come back afraid. They say, "We can't take this land. The people are too large and great...we'll never be able to do it." And those spies win the day. They convince the people that the land God had promised for centuries to them was impossible to take. But then you'll see Caleb and Joshua (two great names, by the way) stand up and say, "No, we can take this land." And they're going to be models of faith, but what they have is really pretty simple. They trust in the character of God and they praise the Word of God. God had spoken. He had said this land was theirs. It was that simple, in Joshua and Caleb's mind. For if God has spoken, that settles it. God has spoken...his Word is supreme...his Word is sure...and his Word is sufficient...it's all we need to know that God will deliver us from darkness and bring us into the light of life in the Promised Land.

Maybe a more contemporary illustration will help. I think of families in this faith family who are walking through cancer right now, and they are facing major fear—*real* fear—and yet in the middle of it, the Lord is giving faith in and through his Word. Oh, to hear them talk about the surety of God's Word and the power of God's promises as they lift their hearts not just to God, but to his Word, and they trust in it as supreme and sure and sufficient.

Now you can't lift your heart to his Word if you don't know his Word, right? This is why we read the Bible together as a church, and it's one of the things I love about a daily Bible reading plan. There are days when we simply read the next chapter in the reading, and it seems to hit right at where we are in our lives in a particular, poignant way. Now sure, there are other days when we wonder, "Ok, what does this chapter mean and how does it apply to my life?" But who knows how God is using our reading of *that* Word on *that* day to prepare us for something that may be coming one day in the future? Who knows what promises God has stored in the psalms we'll read this week that will either penetrate to the core of the circumstances we're walking through this week or prepare us for something that's to come next week? Oh, church, at all times, whether you're overwhelmed, opposed, alone, or afraid now, or knowing that one day in the future you'll be overwhelmed, opposed, alone, or afraid, lift up your hearts to the Word of God and join Caleb and Joshua and scores of brothers and sisters who have gone before us, believing that God's Word is supreme, that it is sure, and that it is sufficient.

Place your hope in the Son of God.

So those are the two main exhortations in Psalm 56. They're the core of that section that's repeated in verses 3 and 4. David puts his trust in the character of God and he lifts his heart to the Word of God. But we know that this psalm does not ultimately end in verse 13, for along with all of Scripture, it points to something greater. More specifically, along with all of Scripture, it points to *Someone* greater. Jesus Christ is the center of the Bible, and he is the center of this hymnbook known as Psalms. Therefore, the ultimate exhortation in this Psalm, when seen in light of all of Scripture, is that when you are overwhelmed or opposed,

alone or afraid, put your trust in the character of God, lift your heart to the Word of God, and place your hope in the Son of God.

Jesus encapsulates the first two exhortations. First, he is the fullness of God's character. All of these attributes of God—his omnipotence and mercy, his justice and kindness—are fully revealed in the person of Christ. And so the call to put your trust in the character of God is a call to put your trust in Christ. He is the one who delivers us from darkness and death. He has taken the judgment due our sin, he has died on a cross in our place, and he has risen from the grave in victory over death, so that you and I might walk with God in the light of life.

Oh, I invite you, non-Christian friend, today, to put your trust in Christ. He knows your sin, he sees your suffering, and he longs to save you...to show you mercy, and to raise you up to new life with him, so that you never have to fear, so that you are never alone, so that no matter who or what opposes or overwhelms you, in him you can trust.

This is the beauty of Romans 8 that I mentioned earlier. David says in Psalm 56:9, *"This I know, that God is for me,"*—oh, that's a sentence worth memorizing. Memorize that (*"This I know, that God is for me."*) and know that this confession of faith is grounded in the work of Christ for us. Paul goes on to say in Romans 8...*"If God is for us who can be against us?"* And that whole question—rhetorical question—is based on the work of Christ on our behalf. *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised [to life]."* Listen to this. Christ Jesus right now *"...is at the right hand of God...interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" Or cancer or this person or that person or whatever else? No. "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:31-39)

Oh, see it! If God in Christ has saved you from sin, death, hell, and the devil, then what circumstance in this world can you not trust him in? What can man do to you? You can trust God in Christ amidst overwhelming opposition, amidst loneliness and fear. He has taken on sin and death on your behalf. You now have nothing to fear.

Put your hope in the character of God, knowing Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's character, *and* lift your hearts to the Word of God, knowing that he [Jesus] is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). David praises the Word because it brings light to his life. Jesus says, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12). He also says, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly"* (John 10:10). Oh, see it in Christ, for the Word of God made flesh is the light of life. In the midst of being overwhelmed or opposed, alone or afraid, fix your gaze on the face of Christ, and you will find yourself moving from fear to faith. You will find yourself saying, "In him I trust. What can man—what can this world—do to me?"

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